

CITY OF HELENA PLANNING DIVISION
316 North Park Avenue
Helena, Montana 59623

File: GP Staff Report PB
Date: October 28, 2019
406-447-8492

STAFF REPORT

TO: City of Helena/Lewis and Clark County Consolidated Planning Board

FROM: Michael McConnell, Planner II
Lucy Morel-Gengler, Planner II
Sharon Haugen, Community Development Director

SUBJECT: To Consider a Resolution to Repeal the 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy and Adopt the 2019 City of Helena Growth Policy

GENERAL INFORMATION

**PUBLIC HEARING DATE: Helena/Lewis and Clark County Consolidated Planning Board – 6:00pm
Wednesday November 6th, 2019**

BACKGROUND

The 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy incorporated a lengthy public outreach and data review process and was an extensive update and rewrite of the 2008 City Growth Policy. The 2011 Growth Policy provides the foundation for the current 2019 update. This 2019 update is due to a variety of factors including the emergence from the Great Recession, rapidly increasing housing costs and a growing population. The update was needed to adjust the cities growth strategy to reflect new or emerging community priorities and goals, update data included in 2011 and to add a significant implementation section. The City of Helena Community Development Department along with key stakeholders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors of the Helena community have come together to update the 2011 Growth Policy. SCJ Alliance, Inc. was hired to complete the document text and facilitate a robust public process.

Analysis of State Law

State law directs jurisdictions to include certain elements in a growth policy which are generally stated and addressed below (M.C. A. 76-1-601). This update process has made sure to include consideration of these provisions within the 2019 City of Helena Growth Policy Update. The process to evaluate a jurisdictions growth policy every 5 years and if necessary, update is also mandated by state law.

- **Community Goals & Objectives**

A significant part of any planning document are the goals and objectives of the community. This document employs these goals as the basis for the implementation strategy and actions table. A complete list of related goals and objectives can be found at the end of each chapter. A comprehensive list is found in Appendix A.

- Land Uses
Existing land uses are described extensively in Chapter 3: Land Use. This chapter describes not only existing land uses and trends, but also provides historical context and future implications. It further describes opportunities for positive land use development policy within the city such as addressing infill development, the neighborhood center development concepts, joint city/county development standards within the urban standards boundary and a more directive annexation policy. Maps titled Area Existing Land Use, Neighborhood Centers and Area Future Land Use describe these characteristics visually.
- Population
Characteristics of Helena's population are described in Chapter 2: Population and Economy. Within this chapter the population of Helena is described using the most current U.S. Census data and compares it to Lewis and Clark County and the State of Montana. This data gives a comprehensive picture of the population of Helena and describes both past and future trends and possible implications.
- Housing Needs
Chapter 4: Housing describes the current state of housing in Helena as well as future trends and potential needs. This includes the number and type of housing units within the city limits and the condition of those units. The chapter also describes housing costs for renters and owners with other issues related to housing such as housing affordability across the income spectrum, preservation of existing units and neighborhoods, poverty and homelessness and how regulations impact the construction of new, or redevelopment of existing housing. Information related to the conditions of structures and year built provide emphasis for the data within the chapter.
- Economic Conditions
The economic condition for the city is described in Chapter 2: Population and Economy. This chapter provides information related to employment characteristics and business climate. The chapter uses U.S. Census data as well as organizational data gathered throughout this process. The sections included in Chapter 2 provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of Helena's economy and future trends that will be important to consider as the city moves forward.
- Local Services
Chapter 5: Public Facilities and Services and Chapter 6: Transportation addresses the provision and extent of public services offered in Helena. All aspects, of the various water systems are discussed as well as health care, public safety services, multimodal transportation systems and parks including current and future trends. Key issues to be addressed are listed at the end of each chapter subsection. Most city facilities in or around the city are shown on the "Public Facilities" map. This map is not intended to be a comprehensive graphic display of all public facilities addressed in the text, as some, particularly water systems facilities, are located miles from city limits.
- Natural Resources
Environmental and natural resource features and characteristics are discussed in Chapter 7: Natural Environment. Sections within this chapter discuss land and topography including open space and gravel resources, the various plant and animal species and air quality. Helena's water resources are also broken-down including analysis of the future supply and quality with information on riparian

areas and wetlands. Lastly different environmental issues are looked at such as wildfires, earthquakes, noise and light pollution with the varying development constraints these issues present. Wildfires, being of particular risk here in Helena, received an emphasis within the chapter. An evaluation of the risks in different areas of the city are presented and how and where Helena identifies the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Certain action items address the needs for increased regulations within the WUI and how those might be achieved. Resource conservation and climate change represent the final sections in this chapter with subsections on recycling and composting. Current and future trends are discussed within each of the various sections. Maps included in this chapter show development constraints, wildfire hazards, location of public lands, gravel operations, aquifer sensitivity, septic permits and airport noise area.

- Other Characteristics

State law gives jurisdictions some leeway on the inclusion of additional topics to include in the growth policy. Based on this the city has chosen to include a section on Community Culture and Design: Chapter 8. This chapter generally includes sections related to an inventory of the relevant cultural assets, services or conditions as well as current and future trends related to that section. Various maps provide support and visual references for these chapters.

- Implementation

Chapter 9: Implementation and Coordination lists the different mechanisms intended to implement the growth policy and ways the city will interact and cooperate with neighboring or nearby jurisdictions. This chapter highlights the 2009 City/County MOU and certain joint planning efforts being undertaken within the Urban Standards Boundary. Subdivision regulations (also in Chapter 10: Subdivision Review), the Zoning Code and neighborhood plans are shown as possible implementation methods for the various goals, objectives and actions listed in Appendix A: Goals and Objectives Matrix.

Chapter 9 also lays out the process and conditions that would necessitate an update or rewrite of the document and mandates that the document be reviewed at least once every five years.

- Subdivision

Chapter 10: Subdivision Review includes how the subdivision review criteria in MCA 76-3-608(3)(a) is defined and applied to subdivision review in the city. This chapter also includes a statement on how public hearings for subdivisions will be held.

Public Participation and Outreach

- Stakeholder Focus Groups

In the winter of 2018, the City of Helena Community Development Department began the process of updating the 2011 Growth Policy by assembling various community stakeholders to participate in focus groups relating to specific subject areas. Topics included areas such as housing, economic development and policy, transportation, environmental issues, education, recreation and tourism, cultural institutions, local development conditions, city departmental services and relationships with other jurisdictions. During these meetings the consultant and staff engaged the stakeholders in conversations relating to their operations, the local situation and how the growth policy could impact these topics.

- Working Group

Given the immensity and importance of this project a working group was established as a conduit for review and reflection on the direction of the process and to incorporate information gathered from public and institutional sources into the document. In addition to nonprofit groups, members included the local building community, Lewis and Clark County, City of East Helena, Helena Citizens Council, Helena City Commission, Helena Housing Authority and two members of the Helena/Lewis and Clark County Consolidated Planning Board. In general, city staff organized and facilitated these meetings.

- Storefront Studio

As part of this planning effort, a robust public participation effort was undertaken by city staff. A four-day public participation event was held including community workshops on the first day to shed light on how people view Helena. Ten characteristics of life in Helena were shown on a worksheet and groups of four or five were asked to come to a consensus on a ranking of each characteristic. Examples of the characteristics include active downtown, water resources, affordable housing and open space access. Groups ranked these different variables and then were asked to “fund” them out of their ten-dollar budget, indicating the importance the group placed on that topic.

The studio itself, located in a storefront on the walking mall, was open throughout the day so people could walk in on their own schedule. Staff and the consultant team filled the space with various conversation starters and different ways for participants to provide comments including a graffiti comment wall, growth scenario boards and a series of photos showing unique attributes or situations in Helena. Participants would be guided around the room by either a member of the consultant team or city staff explaining the different ways to be involved.

On the last day of the studio, a final workshop was held to test the policy direction participants had identified during the previous three days. A worksheet was created showing ways in which the current growth policy language might be shifted based on the comments received. Small groups would then debate and come to a consensus about each change. As the groups went through the worksheet they would also discuss ways to implement the policy direction and how willing they would be to spend municipal funds on the proposed projects or actions. This debate would show how important each policy shift would be to each group.

Throughout the four days over 200 people came through the studio providing comments and engaging in discussions with the consultant team, staff and each other. Comments from this event would go on to shape the policy direction the update would recommend.

- Helena Building Industry Association (HBIA) Home Show & Lifestyle Expo

Another part of staffs’ engagement strategy was to seek out additional opportunities to involve the public at community events. Staff attended the HBIA Home Show to solicit comments from the attendees via frank conversations and discussions prompted by various maps and other materials about planning and growth in the city. Over the two day event staff engaged with over 100 people and received many comments from residents of both the city and county. Staff recognized the importance of engaging both city and county residents throughout the process and sought to bring the perspective of both city residents and county service users.

- Organization Meetings

As the draft document was being created staff sought to attend different organizations membership meetings to gather more input and to further test the direction received thus far. Groups ranged from hiking and cycling groups to young professionals, governmental and trade groups. Staff gave a general overview of the process to date and of the direction the update was heading then dug into the topic specific to the group and how the growth policy could impact it.

- Pop up Events and Community Meetings

As the growth policy draft update neared completion staff organized six public events over a three-day period to further test the policy direction. Three events were held during lunchtime hours which were more informal in nature and held in various parts of the community. Two evening meetings were set up in a more traditional public meeting setting. The consultant team and staff engaged people with various maps and other written materials that led to discussions regarding the growth policy update document and its direction.

- Farmers Market

City staff was at the farmers market throughout the summer to inform and engage the public on projects related to and being undertaken by the city. This was also a way for the citizenry to engage with staff and present possibly solutions to and issues that they have been experiencing. Community Development Department staff was present at the farmers market on June 1st, July 27th, September 7th and October 19th of 2019 to discuss among other topics the growth policy and its impact on the community. Staff presented maps and selections of text to the public as they visited the farmers market.

- Other Outreach Methods

Various other outreach methods, both traditional and digital, were employed as part of the overall outreach strategy. In addition to generally being available for questions and discussions with the public staff employed an online survey which was part of a website set up for displaying information regarding the update. The website also included links to a mini poll which was delivered directly to the consultant, links to our social media accounts and materials and information gathered over the course of the process.

- Work Sessions

Given the importance of this document it is important to keep the elected or appointed boards and commissions up to date on the where the process is leading and what information is being gathered. Staff updated the City Commission at four administrative meetings. The Planning Board held seven work sessions over the course of the update process, at times including the City Commission and Working Group.

Major Changes from 2011

The proposed 2019 Growth Policy is an update of the 2011 Growth Policy thus much of the information and policy directive has not changed significantly. In general, the major changes include:

- The data and information in each chapter has been updated and the chapters have been edited for clarity.

- The chapters have been re-order and select chapters or sections were combined to reduce repetition or to eliminate outdated information.
- Unlike the 2011 Growth policy, the 2019 Growth Policy Update recognizes that a single Goal or Objective may be applicable to multiple aspects of the community thus the same Goal or Objective may be identified as relevant in multiple chapters.
- The 2019 Growth Policy Update includes an actions section dedicated to implementation of policy Goals and Objectives.
- Some Goals, Objectives and or actions have been added or expanded to reflect community input including affordable housing, sustainability and climate change, a more compact and efficient development pattern, transportation connectivity and improved communication and cooperation.

Chapter specific changes include:

- CH 1: Introduction and Organization
This chapter combines the Executive Summary, Chapter 1: Introduction and Organization and portions of Chapter 13: Future Review, Evaluation and Updates from the 2011 Growth Policy. The public outreach portion has been fully revised describing the public engagement and adoption process used in the 2019 update. Similar to the 2011 document, there is a section describing each of the chapters. The 2019 Update has moved the unified Goals and Objectives list to Appendix A though each chapter still has the applicable Goals and Objectives at the end of the chapter. New to the 2019 documents are a user guide section and a “Community Vision” for Helena.
- CH 2: Population and Economy
This chapter combines Chapters 2: Population and 3: Economic Conditions from the 2011 Growth Policy. This chapter has received a near-full update on all topical data, plus editorial changes identifying Helena’s current conditions and opportunities.
- CH 3: Land Use
In order to emphasize its importance, the Land Use Chapter is now the third chapter instead of the tenth chapter of the 2019 Growth Policy. Past language describing mixed use areas has been updated to include a more specific neighborhood center-based approach. This mechanism promotes citizen involvement in developing strong neighborhoods as well as putting emphasis on stabilization and revitalization in targeted locations. This process will help prioritize investments and focus community efforts. A new section identifying potential Neighborhood Centers is included; this section describes both concept and envisioned conditions in these areas. Changes to the urban standards boundary were incorporated to support Fort Harrison and new county zoning initiatives.
- CH 4: Housing
2019 Growth Policy data indicates Helena is experiencing an increase in the poverty rate and income gap. Increased emphasis on affordable and workforce housing was placed in this chapter as a result. A focus on the construction of attractive, safe and neighborhood compatible housing stock and the associated implementation mechanisms were included in this update. This chapter supports the concept of neighborhood centers to help address the interrelationship of housing, employment, connectivity, and environmentally sensitive development.

- CH 5: Public Facilities & Services

This chapter combines Chapter 5: Public Facilities & Services with portions of Chapter 8: Water and the parks component that was in Chapter 9: Culture from the 2011 Growth Policy. The general facilities and services serving Helena are very similar to those identified in the 2011 Growth Policy. Data related to the facilities and services were updated as necessary to reflect current conditions.

- CH 6: Transportation

Many area streets have been improved, but congestion on major streets, providing adequate and updated facilities for non-motorized travel and public transportation issues continue to be addressed in this chapter. Achieving a multimodal connective transportation system is promoted extensively throughout the chapter and framework.

- CH 7: Natural Environment

This chapter combines Chapter 7: Environment and portions of Chapter 8: Water from the 2011 Growth Policy. Although there have been changes in city code as a result of the 2011 Growth Policy, several issues continue to be community concerns including climate change, air quality, water quality, and resource management which are addressed in the 2019 Update. The urban standards boundary was expanded to better facilitate joint standards within the Wildland Urban Interface.

- CH 8: Community Culture and Design

Helena's strong art community and historic identity are highlighted in this chapter similarly to the 2011 Growth Policy. A new section on Community Design has been included going beyond design standards to include all aspects of Helena's sense of place to broaden this chapter's perspective on what makes a community.

- CH 9: Coordination and Implementation

This chapter includes portions of Chapter 13: Future Review, Evaluation, and Updates and Chapter 11: Coordination and continues to encourage communication and coordination with neighboring jurisdictions. The implementation component has been expanded and strengthened from the 2011 Growth Policy. This chapter includes an action section with a number of specific items for the city to pursue to help implement this Growth Policy.

- CH 10: Subdivision Review

Updated with few changes; this chapter now incorporates a requirement to evaluate infrastructure installation timing with preliminary plat review.

Findings

Staff, along with the project consultant, has conducted a thorough and robust public process seeking an informed direction from the citizens of Helena. Through the public engagement process staff has gathered input from multiple sources and sought to achieve as comprehensive a picture of the needs and desires from the public as possible. Staff believes that due to this process the Growth Policy Update and document are representative of Helena's community ideals.

Staff recommendation:

Motion to Recommend Approval of a Resolution to Repeal the 2011 City of Helena Growth Policy and Adopt the 2019 City of Helena Growth Policy